

**INTERVIEW WITH MRS. CHESTER DAVIS age 91**  
**Formerly (ERMA KLIEFOTH) JULY 3, 1974**  
**BY ROBERT PERSONIUS**

MR. PERSONIUS: This is an interview with Mrs. Chester Davis, of Peebles, Wisconsin. Mrs. Davis is the former Erma Kliefoth of Mayville; whose mother and father were Manager of the Horicon Shooting Club at one time. Erma would accompany her parents to the club during Septembers and Octobers to take care of it for the club. I interviewed Mrs. Davis on July 3, 1974 at her home in Peebles. Let's start from the beginning. Weren't you born in Mayville?

MRS. DAVIS: Right.

MR. PERSONIUS: In what year?

MRS. DAVIS: '82. December 25, 1882. In Mayville, Wisconsin.

MR. PERSONIUS: What was your family's association with the Horicon Shooting Club?

MRS. DAVIS: My father was the manager there for years.

MR. PERSONIUS: What year did he start being manager out there?

MRS. DAVIS: I was about ten years old when he started.

MR. PERSONIUS: So he started in about 1892. He lived in Mayville, but your mother and father would move out to the club during the hunting season?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah.

MR. PERSONIUS: And they lived right in the clubhouse?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, they lived right in the clubhouse. We'd go in the last of August to get ready. The shooting started at the first of September and we closed on October the 15<sup>th</sup>.

MR. PERSONIUS: And you stayed out there too?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, and I always missed two months of school because I stayed out there to help. My mother had another; younger child out there and I had to help.

MR. PERSONIUS: What did you do?

MRS. DAVIS: I took care of the baby, waited on table and wiped dishes.

MR. PERSONIUS: How many years did you do that?

MRS. DAVIS: I think it was about four years in succession. It was about 1892 to 1905 or 1906.

MR. PERSONIUS: During that time the Stookes family owned the farm?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, that's right. Mr. Stookes had two families. He had a second wife. His first wife died. I didn't know her. But he married a second wife and they had three children; Amos and Willy and Lilly. There were two children with the first wife; Frank and Julius.

MR. PERSONIUS: Who managed the club before your father?

MRS. DAVIS: I wouldn't know.

MR. PERSONIUS: Who managed the club after your father quit?

MRS. DAVIS: I don't remember that.

MR. PERSONIUS: What did the Stooke family have to do with the club while your father worked there?

MRS. DAVIS: Nothing. They lived right next-door, real close. We used to buy chickens from them to feed the members of the club.

MR. PERSONIUS: How did you get supplies for the club while you were there?

MRS. DAVIS: We drove over to either Oak Hill or Mayville.

MR. PERSONIUS: Who did?

MRS. DAVIS: Sometimes I did. I remember many times I drove the horse and buggy as far as Oak Hill or Mayville. Mayville was eleven miles from there and it was quite a trip for me, but I made it.

MR. PERSONIUS: How long did it take?

MRS. DAVIS: An hour and a half, one-way. I'd do the shopping and then come back.

MR. PERSONIUS: Whom do you remember as club members?

MRS. DAVIS: Well, there was Fred McClain and Robert Keating.

MR. PERSONIUS: Were these men from Fond du Lac?

MRS. DAVIS: Yes. And from Mayville there was Robert Longebaugh, Carl Longibaugh and Tony Welsh, Paul Wisteen who was at that time a Senator. That's all there was from Mayville. But there were members from Milwaukee, Chicago and New York. There was a Mr. Webber from New York. And John and Lewis Wolfe who manufactured plumbing outfits. They had a plumbing shop. There was a man by the name of Kinney; he was quit an old man, he played solitaire most of the time but he went hunting too. He was from New York. Today is one of my poor thinking days, I can't think so good.

MR. PERSONIUS: What about Governor Peck?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, Governor Peck, he rode "Peck's Bad Boy". [A horse]. He was there. My younger sister and I went out shooting with a gun at the stones. There was one that flew back and hit Governor Peck in the face, on the cheek. It drew a little blood but wasn't bad. I got some [sounds like] cork plaster and spit on it, and put it on his face. They used to have a register of how many ducks everybody shot and Governor Peck wrote in there that Brita Kliefoth, my sister who rated the shot got him. He wrote; "Governor Peck, 20 ducks and Brita Kliefoth, one Governor." He wrote that down in the book. There was Hagar from Fond du Lac, I forget what it did. I think he worked in a bank. If I saw a picture, I could remember who all was in the picture.

MR. PERSONIUS: You told me a story once about when you and your sister where out and you jumped a ditch?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh, you mean to light the fire on the marsh? This was years later. We were a little older. There was quite a ditch there and we jumped it because the wind was coming from the south, so we thought we'd better jump it and the wind would blow north. But by the time we got up there the wind had changed and we came back. On the way back there a big deep slough there and I said to my sister, "Look out! You'll fall in the ditch!" She thought I said, "You son of a bitch!" That I remember very well. My father asked us where we were, "You didn't light that fire did you?" "Why no! Why would we light a fire?!" So he never knew that we did it. And that was a bad thing to do because there was a lot of farmers who had cut the marsh, and that burned down. I remember, I was there when McKinley was shot. I was at the clubhouse then. I don't remember how old I was.

MR. PERSONIUS: What was a hunter's day like? What time did they get up?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh, they got up very early; four or five o'clock in the morning. They could shoot any time they saw a duck. They'd come home sometimes with 10, 12 or 15 beautiful ducks. There were also Mud Hens and Rice Hens. There's a difference. Rice Hens are a finer bird. They live mostly on the rice beds. The Mud Hens weren't so fussy and they didn't taste so good. One time Governor Peck shot a Shypole and he asked my mother if she would cook it for him. She turned up her nose, but said that she would. She cooked it, and he ate it and enjoyed it. There was a man by the name of Thomas. He had a restaurant on East Water Street. He shot a lot of ducks and took them home and served them in his restaurant. I remember him well.

MR. PERSONIUS: What's the most they would get in one day?

MRS. DAVIS: If they stayed more than four days, they'd take the dressing out of the ducks and put hay in so they wouldn't spoil. We didn't have iceboxes to keep them. When the people came from Chicago and New York, they came by train to La Myra, and then they'd drive them over to the clubhouse, that was 12 miles I think.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they have breakfast in the morning before they went out?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh yes. In those days we had to buy bacon by the slab. It was always quite salted. Mother would slice it in the evening and soak it so it wouldn't be do salty. It was awfully hard work there. Mother also baked all of the bread for those people. It was very hard work. We always had a girl, a helper. These hunters had pushers too. These were fellows who would come and push the boats for them. They had to stand up and push the boats because the water wasn't very deep but the bottom was very muddy. I fell in one and found out how deep it was. There was very little water, but all of this real fine marsh mud. One time, when I father was gone; I sneaked and took my father's gun. I went out to see how many Mud Hens I could get with one shot. Instead of kneeling down, I stood up and shot. I fell in, and so did the gun. I dodged and got the gun because I knew I'd catch hell if my father came home and his gun was gone. There was a long pier that went out to the marsh. I got as far and the pier and walked back in on it. But we never did find the boat. It went down with the tide towards Horicon. It was windy. Early in the spring, my father used to seed the rice. They'd send him rice by the barrel. He'd seed the rice for the ducks. We'd take it in pails in the boat and spread it around. Most of the hunters had their own boats. We had four different boathouses where they would keep their boats. The boats stayed there all winter. In those days they would just stay there. No one would steal them.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they have their own decoys?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh yeah. They all had their own. They kept them in the boathouses.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they have live decoys?

MRS. DAVIS: No, I don't remember them using live decoys. They were wooden ones. They were beautifully painted. They were lovely. From a distance you couldn't tell them. They always had a squawker. When they saw some ducks at a distance, they'd have the decoys out and they'd blow on this squawker and would sound like a duck. Occasionally, the ducks would come over that way, and they'd take their shots.

MR. PERSONIUS: When would they come in from hunting, for lunch?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, they'd generally come in about one o'clock. They have lunch, and then have dinner in the evening.

MR. PERSONIUS: What did they do then, in the afternoon? Did they hunt again?

MRS. DAVIS: No, they rested. They'd lie down and rest. Some would go out again a little later towards evening. They sat around. There was a lovely clubhouse. They'd sit and play cards, but they never gambled. They just played cards. My father had some liqueur here. Everyone who wanted a drink would have to put money in the kitty so they could get a drink. It was usually just a little shot.

MR. PERSONIUS: Well, if they were getting up early, they were probably going to bed early.

MRS. DAVIS: They always went to bed early. In those days we had bunk beds. They had good bedding; good sheets and quilts. They had to bring their water in from outside. There was a cistern outside and they'd bring some in for their washbasin and pitcher. I'm still trying to remember some of the people who came out there. There were so many. There was Tom Watson. He was a mail carrier in Fond du Lac.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they ever get any geese?

MRS. DAVIS: Very seldom. The geese didn't come until later, and by that time, the hunting season was over. The geese never came until after the hunt and the clubhouse were closed.

MR. PERSONIUS: What kind of ducks did they hunt?

MRS. DAVIS: There were Green and Blue Winged Teal, Mallards, Red Heads which were wonderful; Canvasbacks. And there was one duck that had so many feathers, I hated to clean them, I forgot the name. The Green Winged Teals weren't so good, but the Blue Winged Teals were better somehow.

MR. PERSONIUS: And Mud Hens, Rice Hens and Shipoltes.

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah.

MR. PERSONIUS: Were there any other kinds of birds that they'd shoot?

MRS. DAVIS: No. They were mostly ducks.

MR. PERSONIUS: What about Prairie Chickens?

MRS. DAVIS: No, it was all marshy. The Prairie Chickens would come on the marsh. I can't think of anything else. I'm so forgetful. A couple of years ago I could have remembered more but when you get to be 91 years old, near 92, why you don't remember.

MR. PERSONIUS: You remember a lot I think.

MRS. DAVIS: Well, a couple of years ago I could remember very good. But in the last year, I've failed just terribly. Just getting too darned old! What can you do, but wait 'til the Lord calls for you? It's a good thing when you get old to have a hobby. I like to play cards. So if I'm here and there's no one to play cards with me, I'll play solitaire. If I can get a Pinochle player, then I'm happy.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did you play cards with the men at the hunting club?

MRS. DAVIS: No, oh no, but my father did. We never were in the dining room when they were in there. There was a fellow named Hamilton who was there. He used to live at Fond du Lac.

MR. PERSONIUS: Oh yeah, he was a friend of Galloway's wasn't he?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, he was. He was just a young boy when he came with his father.

MR. PERSONIUS: He they used to cook some of the ducks they got and eat them, or did they take most of them home with them?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh they always took them home. Those that my father shot we would cook. Those were wonderful, those wild ducks. But you have to know how to cook them.

MR. PERSONIUS: You said that you planted wild rice. Did you ever harvest any rice?

MRS. DAVIS: No. In those days, wild rice wasn't so common as it is now. Nowadays you pay a big price for wild rice. But in those days we didn't know enough about it to cook it. It grew beautifully. It got real tall. They'd ship it in by the barrel.

MR. PERSONIUS: What other types of animals do you remember there? Were there a lot of muskrats?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah. The Stookes used to catch the muskrats. Then, they'd feed them to the chickens. They couldn't use the eggs. The eggs tasted like muskrats. I'm still trying to think of some of the other hunters that were there. They were all wonderful people there. There were never any swear words. You never heard any swearing of foul language.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did the men hunt alone a lot; just one man and one boat?

MRS. DAVIS: Not very often. If they could get a pusher, they'd rather take a pusher along. Johnny and Ferdinand Strup and Charles Luckman, they were pushers. They lived around there. Some of the farmers who lived around there did it.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they have blinds? How did they hunt?

MRS. DAVIS: Not very often. Every once in a while. I remember one man, I forget what his name was, but he wanted a blind. He thought he could hide and get more ducks. They all went out in the open.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they push the boats into the cattails a little bit to cover them up a little bit and put the decoys out?

MRS. DAVIS: No, I never saw them cover them up, they just set out the decoys. They just sat out there and waited 'til the ducks came. Sometimes they waited a long time.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they hunt any place they wanted to, or were there special places to hunt?

MRS. DAVIS: I've forgotten the names of where they went but they all seemed to have their own route. They mostly all went south from the beginning of the marsh. I don't know why. They seldom went the other way. But they always went towards Horicon. It's not very far. When they pushed themselves they were pretty well played out when they came home. They were tired and glad to lie down. Burt Ambee from Fond du Lac was quite a hunter there too. And Henry Minner, was a photographer.

MR. PERSONIUS: When they came back then, and they weren't staying long, what did they do with the ducks?

MRS. DAVIS: If they weren't going to stay long, they just hung them up outside and took them home when they left. If they stayed longer, they'd dress them. They take the insides out and stuff hay in them.

MR. PERSONIUS: But they left their guns and shell at the clubhouse when they went home?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, they all had their own lockers where they put the guns and shells in. There was a whole long row of lockers.

MR. PERSONIUS: The clubhouse was there the kitchen was and the meals were served?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah.

MR. PERSONIUS: And the building next to it was where they slept?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, that was all of the bedrooms, two stories. There were seven rooms upstairs and seven upstairs. There was a big hall in there where they washed. One of my jobs was to make the beds. They were easy to make. They didn't have sheets, just blankets. They slept between cotton blankets.

MR. PERSONIUS: How was the building heated? Was there was a stove?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, there was a stove. In those days, it didn't seem to get cold so early. They didn't need much fire.

MR. PERSONIUS: Before October 15<sup>th</sup>? Well did you enjoy it; living and working out there?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah, I enjoyed it. I guess I didn't know any better. I was told what I had to do and I did it. There was no ifs, ands or buts about it. They would tell me, "You're coming along now, and you can make it up when you come back to school!" I always had to miss that school in September and part of October.

MR. PERSONIUS: But you got to do a little bit of hunting yourself didn't you?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh yeah, especially when my one sister came out. She and I would go out together. That is, when the hunters were gone, and Pa was gone so we could get his gun. We never went out when the hunters were there.

MRS. PERSONIUS: Do you remember how much anything cost? How much did the hunters pay to come out there?



MRS. DAVIS: No, I never paid any attention to that. There was never any squabble about that. I never heard any arguments like they do nowadays. Mr. McLain used to order the soups for us. We'd buy soups in big cans. In those days I thought it was terribly expensive. One big gallon can of soup was 85 cents. They were like green turtle soup, and I forget the other ones, but they were very good soup. They always served soup for dinner as the first course. In those days, poor mother would fry steak. No matter how many were there, she'd fry steak for them all. She didn't ask if they wanted it rare or well done. She fried it and put it on the table. There was bacon and eggs every morning.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they have good china?

MRS. DAVIS: No, it was just ordinary, real plain white china. But there was plenty of it. And there was just plain silver and paper napkins. Sometimes we had linen napkins. I remember one man from town made up some napkin holders. We didn't have napkins for all of them. I remember they'd roll them up and put them in these little aluminum napkin rings.

MR. PERSONIUS: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MRS. DAVIS: There were nine of us. But the two younger ones weren't born out there. We didn't have them when we were going out there. Carl was the youngest one. Do you remember Carl? He was the baby and he'd get croup. One time he had croup so bad and mother had heard about the membrane forming in the throat. She took a little kerosene with sugar on it and put that down his throat. It broke that membrane in his throat. And if you know what the croup is it was a terrible thing. You could almost choke on it.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did you ever go back to the club after your father quit working there?

MRS. DAVIS: No, oh no. I never went back. After he quit, they hired a woman. And after he quit my mother wouldn't go out any more. She had plenty to do with our house and all of the children.

MR. PERSONIUS: What did your father do besides that?

MRS. DAVIS: He was a Deputy Sheriff for years. And at one time, he had a tavern in a big building downtown.

MR. PERSONIUS: The club leased all that land right? Did they ever have trouble with trespassers?

MRS. DAVIS: Not especially no. People lived differently in those days. They weren't so destructive. I never heard of them having any trouble.

MR. PERSONIUS: And they never hunted in the spring?

MRS. DAVIS: No, just in the fall. Spring was the time when he went out to plant the wild rice, but there never was any spring hunting when I was there.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they dig any ditches?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh yeah. There was one long ditch that you had to cross to get to the main area. But I don't remember them digging it. That was there when I came there. There was a long, long pier built on there. Sometimes they left their boat at the end of the pier and just come in for a while. Then they'd walk back out to the end of the pier where their boat was.

MR. PERSONIUS: But they didn't dig any ditches while you were there?

MRS. DAVIS: No.

MR. PERSONIUS: Were there any dams to hold the water back?

MRS. DAVIS: No that was probably down further on Horicon marsh. But not along where I was.

MR. PERSONIUS: So you weren't there when they built the main ditch, that was before or after you left?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did they ever complain about there not being enough water?

MRS. DAVIS: No. It was the funniest thing. It seemed like there was four or five inches of water and the rest was this fine mud. It was so soft that if you stepped in there you'd keep right on going down. But the water never very high above that. You could always see the mud.

MR. PERSONIUS: Were there any fish in there?

MRS. DAVIS: No, I never heard of any fishing there. I don't think a fish could live in that marsh.

I'm still trying to think of all of the men who were there. There were many, many there.

MR. PERSONIUS: What about Cramer?

MRS. DAVIS: I don't remember a Cramer.

MR. PERSONIUS: Were there any other hunting clubs?

MRS. DAVIS: No, I never knew of any other clubs. There was a Green head club that was down near Horicon. It really was a beautiful clubhouse. There was a great big porch. And there were heavy beamed ceilings. It beautifully built. And when they quit there, I went to see it a couple of times. It all went to pieces. The farmers hauled all of the wood away.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did any women ever come there to hunt?

MRS. DAVIS: No.

MR. PERSONIUS: The club members never brought their wives?

MRS. DAVIS: No, they never did. Mr. Bishop from Fond du Lac, he came there. He had a brewery there. He used to furnish the beer. I used to get a kick out of him. He furnished the beer. But when he wanted to drink some, he brought his own case. He didn't buy any from the club like the others.

MR. PERSONIUS: The members brought other guests with them didn't they?

MRS. DAVIS: Occasionally, but not very often.

MR. PERSONIUS: What were the most hunters that would be there at one time?

MRS. DAVIS: I think in all, sixty belonged to it. The most that were there at one time were ten or fifteen. There was never a big crowd at a time.

MR. PERSONIUS: What was the most ducks that any one man shot in one day?

MRS. DAVIS: I think 30 was the most a fellow had in one day. But he didn't stay long. He was afraid they'd spoil. He went home early. I can't think of his name.

MR. PERSONIUS: I suppose that later in the season more ducks came?

MRS. DAVIS: Yeah. Red heads and the canvasbacks always seemed to come later in the season. Widgeons would come. They were hard to pluck. I always hated it if they gave

us a widgeons to cook. They were good eating though. But they had so many pinfeathers.

MR. PERSONIUS: Which duck was best to eat?

MRS. DAVIS: Oh, the canvasback, or the red head. They were bigger too.

MR. PERSONIUS: What kind of geese did they get if they got any at all?

MRS. DAVIS: I don't know if they got anything but Canadian geese.

MR. PERSONIUS: They never got any white geese?

MRS. DAVIS: No.

MR. PERSONIUS: Did you ever see a swan there?

MRS. DAVIS: No. I never heard of one being there. Most of the ducks came of the clubhouse was closed and after the season was over. Most of the geese came then. I remember Father used to correspond with McLain and he'd tell him that he saw a lot of geese after the season was closed.

MR. PERSONIUS: And nobody hunted on the marsh after the season was closed?

MRS. DAVIS: No, unless they went out and no body knew about it. I'd still like to remember all of the people who were there. I used to know them all. But for the last couple of years my mind doesn't function the way it should.

MR. PERSONIUS: Well, you've told me an awful lot!

MRS. DAVIS: I'm sorry I can't think better, but my thinker's gone on the blink. And when you get old you get terribly tired. On I get so tired sometimes that I'm even too tired to go to sleep. I don't know why. I can't do anything to help around the house anymore. I wash dishes occasionally. And it's too bad. You've got the ambition, but you haven't got the strength. Somebody told me to try a little brandy in the afternoon. I tried that but it made me sleepier than ever. So I gave that up. I'm sorry I can't tell you more about it. In a week or so, after I've had to time reminisce then I'll think of a lot of them.

MR. PERSONIUS: All right, I'll call you back.